

Senate hears testimony on superfund

■ Libby CAG urges polluters' tax reinstated

Libby area Community Advisory Group concerns for the dwindling funds available for Superfund cleanup drew national press attention Wednesday as a Senate subcommittee on Superfund management discussed the issue in Washington, D.C.

In letters to members of the Montana congressional delegation, the group said Superfund listing is "meaningless without consistent and adequate funding."

The Senate subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics, Risk, and Waste Management listened Wednesday to testimony from a top official at the Environmental Protection Agency, environmentalists and people who live near Superfund sites on the issue of continued cleanup funding.

Earlier this year, in presenting his fiscal year 2003 budget, President Bush said he would not seek reauthorization of the Superfund tax and preferred instead to see the program funded by the taxpayers.

In 1995, the U.S. Congress refused to reauthorize the tax against corporations and since then the Superfund trust fund has dropped from \$3.8 million to a projected \$28 million next year.

The Libby CAG's concern is about the need for adequate funding for the cleanup of toxic tremolite asbestos that exists in varying amounts amidst the vermiculite once mined by W.R. Grace in the area.

"We are extremely troubled by this information," CAG wrote in a letter dated March 14. "As you know, one of the most frequent concerns raised over Superfund designation relates to timely clean up. The community of Libby needs to know that clean-up will be comprehensive, and that it will be completed in the most expeditious manner. Under the current funding

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regime, clean-up efforts in Libby and elsewhere are certain to suffer significant delays and less comprehensive clean up."

Marianne Horinko, assistant administrator of the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response for the EPA, testified that the White House was committed to the Superfund program.

"This administration reinforced its commitment to the polluter pays principle by securing cleanup from responsible parties at approximately 70 percent of non-Federal Superfund sites," Horinko said. "Fiscal Year 2001 produced a near record in Superfund cost recovery and cleanup commitments

from responsible parties."

EPA's enforcement program generated \$1.7 billion, nearly \$300 million more than in Fiscal Year 2000 and the second highest amount in the history of the Superfund program, she said.

The cumulative value of responsible party commitments since the inception of the program now exceeds \$20 billion.

"The President's fiscal year 2003 budget request continues a commitment to clean up hazardous waste sites by maintaining EPA's budget for the Superfund program with a request of \$1.29 billion," Horinko said.

According to the congressional requested study "Superfund: What Will It Cost?," \$14 billion to \$16 billion will be needed during the next 10 years for the Superfund program.

In 1994, taxpayers paid \$250 million for Superfund cleanups with corporate taxes paying \$950 million. In 1999 the taxpayers covered \$350 million of

the cost with corporations paying for \$700 million.

By 2004, all the money will come from taxpayers.

"The asbestos contamination resulting from the W.R. Grace mine and related milling and refining operations has resulted in devastating loss of life in Libby and pervasive lung illnesses among hundreds of Montana citizens," the CAG letter continued. "Every day of delay is another day in which some community members suffer additional asbestos exposure. Every day is another day our community struggles with the overwhelming costs of medical expenses."

"It is unconscionable that we, as taxpayers, be burdened with clean-up costs."

CAG mailed its letter to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, U.S. Sen. Conrad Burns and U.S. Rep. Dennis Rehberg with copies going to EPA Administrator Christy Todd Whitman and Jack McGraw, who was acting administrator for EPA's Region 8.

